DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 062 797 EM 009 839

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TITLE	Cable and the Arts.
INSTITUTION	Alfred P. Sloan Foundation, New York, N.Y.
PUB DATE	Mar 71
NOTE	30p.; Report of the Sloan Commission on Cable Communications
EDRS PRICE	MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS	*Cable Television; Economic Factors; *Fine Arts; Programing (Broadcast); *Technological Advancement
IDENTIFIERS	Channel Capacity; *Sloan Commission on Cable Communications

ABSTRACT

Television has been less hospitable to the arts in the United States than in other parts of the world, although there have been some efforts to provide the public with some artistic forms of entertainment. If the reason that the arts have been largely neglected on television is its limited channel capacity that democracy must devote to more popular entertainment, then the multichannel cable solves that problem. However, there are still the problems of producing and financing fine arts programing. Some of the ways that these missions can be accomplished include pay-TV, setting up cable as a technical variant of broadcast programing with programs supported by advertisers, and cable programing as a gift to cable subscribers. An obvious source of arts programing which has not been taken advantage of is the university--and it seems clear that the talents of the amateur performer should be used to help reduce the economic problems of production. Finally, there may be something to be said for different approaches to fine arts programs, such as the counterculture's use of videotape. (SH)

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CABLE AND THE ARTS

By

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Author and Music Critic

March 1971

A Report Prepared for the
SLOAN COMMISSION ON CABLE COMMUNICATIONS

The opinions expressed herein are the views of the author and do not reflect necessarily the opinions of the members of the Sloan Commission on Cable Communications or of the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation.

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Television has been less hospitable to the arts in the United States than in other parts of the world. In Britain, the BBC supports several orchestras, televises concerts from Festival Hall and Albert Hall and operas from Covent Garden, Glyndebourne and Aldeburgh, puts on performances by the Royal Shakespeare Company, the various Old Vics and by dance ensembles up to and including the Royal Ballet. Commercial television in Britain has in effect guaranteed the losses of off-Broadway-type theatre groups in cities outside London, and has carried dance presentations by both local and visiting groups. RAI in Italy maintains two "lyric orchestras" for studio opera performances in addition to symphonic ensembles, and picks up occasionally from the state-supported theatres. The separate broadcasting organizations of the German länder have major musical and dramatic ensembles under contract, sometimes with and sometimes without cooperation from local government; Karajan's separate Easter-time Salzburg Festival is made possible in part by deals with Südwestdeutsche Rundfunk and Oesterreichischer Rundfunk, for which he has made films of most of his major productions--films that have played one-night stands at Philharmonic Hall in this country, but have been broadcast on Eurovision throughout Europe. Though French television tends to be much less supportive

of the arts (for very American reasons--union contracts, plus a theoretical commitment to television art as a distinct enterprise) the week's schedule in France is likely to offer one or two hours of more serious artistic interest than a viewer is likely to find on American airwaves. In general, performing ensembles that play for real audiences are much more significant in European broadcasting than they are here; and payment for broadcast services is much more significant in the budgets of European artistic institutions than it has ever been here.

Attention to the arts has greatly declined in American broadcasting since the days of radio. Both NBC and CBS maintained radio symphony orchestras (NBC for almost two decades, with Arturo Toscanini at the helm), and both commissioned radio plays of considerable pretension. Metropolitan Opera broadcasts were (and still are) a feature of Saturday afternoon, and auditions for the opera were on the air. Apart from nationwide hookups for the New York Philharmonic and sometimes other orchestras, local stations often carried local concerts, typically with sponsorship by a local bank or utility, which contributed to the financial stability of the orchestra. So elitist a form as chamber music got a play--the harpsichordist Sylvia Marlowe, for example, was under contract to NBC, and put together groups that introduced Vivaldi (then esoteric) and commissioned pieces (still esoteric), and "swung the classics" (always shocking). Even today, the "good music" FM station has a role in many communities, though that role usually has little to do with the presentation of live performances--and almost never contributes to the income of musicians.

Hosts of reasons can be marshalled to explain the difference between European and American television. The European tradition of state patronage of the arts obviously extends to state broadcasting stations. ("The BBC," says an official document, "has long been recognized as the most powerful single influence in British musical life."*) Given the stature and clout of existing artistic institutions, television abroad was more or less compelled to seek for ways to use them, while in the United States the limited resources available for the promotion of serious programming went chasing the will-o'-the-wisp of a new art form called "television" that would not use older performing ensembles. (Thus, the Germans have brought in distinguished film directors to work with Karajan on television projects for the Berlin Symphony, and Boulez has helped the BBC develop techniques for superimposing a score over the performers of absolute music, but no imagination has been applied to such efforts here.) Initial perceptions about television and the arts have proved remarkably resistant to experience: though dance in its various forms has been the art with the most rapidly expanding audience through the television years--and efforts as early as those on Omnibus showed the television screen a surprisingly capable receptor of dance imagery--little has been done to bring dancers and image orthicons together.

It should not be thought that American television has done nothing at all with or for the arts. NBC for several years sponsored a capable opera company (now resurrected, with the same

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*The BBC and the Arts. British Broadcasting Corp. London, 1968. p. 6

leadership personnel, for NET); CBS covered the opening of Lincoln Center, telecast some Sol Hurok Russians, presented a number of children's concerts, mostly with eonard Bernstein; for some years the Boston and Chicago orchestras appeared regularly on many noncommercial stations, which also offered several series of interesting "master classes" and ad hoc television adaptations of classic theatre and fiction. Bell, Firestone and Ed Sullivan paid fat fees to big names from the serious music world. Moreover, commercial television's relation to American drama and film-making has been more complicated than most critical opinion seems to assume. The "golden age" of the mid-1950s is perhaps somewhat overadvertised today, but the fact is that television has been for years the major market for dramatic writing and performing in the United States. Every year since the mid-1960s, Hollywood has made more hours of film for television than it made for theatrical use in the years of its heyday. While most of this was pretty bad by any standards, I am by no means certain that the Broadway or off-Broadway theatres always give us better stuff than the average of NBC's Ironsides or ABC's Love, American Style or even some of the made-for-television 90-minute movies. Nor are the revivals of classic plays in our repertory theatres always better than the efforts of the Hallmark Hall of Fame.

Perhaps the most discouraging aspect of broadcast television in the arts was the failure of the non-commercial stations, while locally oriented, to utilize the talents of the repertory theatres that sprang up all around the country in the 1950s--nurtured, as ETV was nurtured, by the Ford Foundation. Nobody who has supervised the first readers of unsolicited manuscripts sent to a magazine, as

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I have, can ever believe that the country is bursting with unrecognized talent. But it is a big country, and there is certainly more talent out there than gets through. It was a tragedy for American television, and perhaps for American culture, that the arts division of Ford and the television division never made contact with each other--that local theatres dried up for lack of audience while local television starved for lack of program and neither was encouraged to work with the other. When Ford took noncommercial television big time, with Public Broadcasting Laboratory, the emphasis was almost entirely on public affairs, to the extent that opening night (the only program in the series that commanded much audience) featured a play of zero aesthetic value, amateurishly performed, selected solely because of some presumed impact on race relations.

There will be a few places in this document where I will ask members of the Commission to tune out certain almost universally received opinions which seem to me part of the noise background of our subject. This is such a place. In 1965, Elihu Katz and David Foulkes commented on "the most intriguing fact in the intellectual history of social research," that "the choice was made to study the mass media as agents of persuasion rather than agents of entertainment."* In all countries, at all times not generally perceived as crisis, the mass meda are and will continue to be primarily agents of entertainment. This is not because people are clods, but

*Katz & Foulkes, On the Use of Mass Media as Escape: Clarification of a Concept. Public Opinion Quarterly, XXVI (1962), pp. 377-388, @ p. 378

because (as Walter Cannon once pointed out) human beings live in their own bloodstreams and not in a public ambiance. Entertainment (especially mass entertainment) reaches deeper than news, goes after more profound reactions in the animal--goes down, indeed, to the level where the lawman's gun and the surgeon's scalpel are functionally equivalent. Even at its most routine, yesterday's television entertainment isn't quite so dead as yesterday's television news.

Art has been variously defined, to say the least. For my purposes, I take it as entertainment which some fraction of competent opinion believes may endure. At bottom, though I make my living as a reporter, I share the sense of the majority that entertainment (in my case, art) usually means more than public affairs. To be specific: the Seventeenth Amendment proclaimed in 1913, was a significant change in the American political system, but even to Americans I do not think it was as important an event as the composition of Le Sacre du Printemps.

II

To resume: when everything is said that can be said on their behalf, the fact remains that the proprietors of American broadcast television have done much less in and for the arts than their European contemporaries. And when all explanations have been considered, one overwhelms the others: European television is programmed essentially by what the British called an Establishment (before American usage corrupted the term), while American television is programmed almost entirely with reference to popular taste.

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The most extensive study of audiences ever made came to the conclusion that the total ticket-buying public for the performing arts, amateur or professional, comes to about 4 per cent of the population age 18 or over.* And this is for all the performing arts put together--concert, opera, dance, theatre. Though the demographic characteristics of the audience stay much the same as one moves from art to art, the individuals are different. For any one of the arts, the total ticket-buying audience must be under 2 per cent of the adult population.

European broadcasters, state-financed, can program for audiences of this size. In Germany, Francois Bundy wrote in early 1971 in The New York Times, "the main support for quality films comes from the television stations of the various German Länder. . .because of a comparatively small elite endowed with almost dictatorial powers in running TV, which imposes its high standards."# Even those who would like to see American television run that way would not be willing to say so in public.

Again, a caveat: properly sold on the right occasion, art can reach through broadcasting to audiences much larger than those indicated by Baumol and Bowen. Arthur Miller's Death of a Salesman racked up the largest share of audience in its time period; the recent Hallmark Hamlet was seen in more than ten million homes. The credo of the Service de la Recherche de l'ORTF can be taken as at least an arguable principle by all men of good-will: "Refuser

*William J. Baumol and William G. Bowen, Performing Arts--The Economic Dilemma, Twentieth Century Fund, New York. 1966, p. 96

#Munich: The Decline of Cinematic Art, NY Times, Feb. 22, 1971, p. 23

absolument cette dichotomie: programme distingué pour l'élite et programme vulgaire pour le populaire."* My own little definition of art clearly includes the early years of The Honeymooners, still playing on local stations in reruns--despite the terrible quality of the kinescopes--nearly twenty years after the initial presentations. More commonly, though, the general law of communications applies: entertainment reaches more people when it is familiar, fashionable, evanescent; fewer people when it is novel, durable, artistic. Where channels are a scarce resource, their use to seek smaller rather than larger audiences may or may not be admirable, but it is obviously undemocratic. And it is certainly unprofitable.

Presumably, non-commercial television could be more active in the arts, but it clearly won't be, for a complex of reasons. As a network, PBS cannot present less-than-professional-standards work of local repertory companies: remote audiences won't tolerate poor quality. With only appropriations and occasional contributions for support (presumably Ford will phase out) it cannot often afford the very considerable costs of professional performance in the collaborative arts involving music. But beyond all that, its bias, as a "public" broadcasting service, seems to be toward larger audiences, even as the bias of the commercial networks. Minorities seem more legitimate to PBS when they can be expressed in terms of race, creed, color or national origin--rather than when they are expressed in terms of taste. In fact, oddly enough, popular commercial programs cut straight across lines of race, creed, color

*Le Service de la Recherche de l'ORTF. ORTF, Paris, 1968. p. 18

and national origin, appealing about equally within such groupings. What television lacks, in terms of diversified service, is the appeal to a variety of tastes.

Let us, if I may, pause again. A national rite like the Super Bowl performs a significant social service by bringing together, in common interest, the varied and often divided groups that form the society. (The matter is most easily seen, perhaps, if one thinks of the Belgians, torn along linguistic lines, watching their national soccer teams on television in the World Cup.) Jazz, with appeals that cut across class and color lines, serves similar functions; and rock, God save us, seems to have linked very disparate individuals among the deafened young. J. Robert Oppenheimer used to look forward to a peaceful world in which some of a man's basic loyalties would be professional--the American physicist would have at least as much in common with a Russian physicist as he would with an American, say, Congressman. The superficially appealing notion that programming must be different for different "communities"--by which is usually meant an ethnic group--is in fact brainless, because the central task of a civilized society is to multiply the number of different group allegiances of an individual, not to concentrate all loyalty in one most obvious corner. Indeed, such concentration can be achieved only by the creation of a common enemy in the world Out There. (And if you seek its monument, look about you.) National magazines and national television have performed immense

services that ought not to be forgotten just because they are so familiar they seem natural. I do not think we are really in much danger of losing these services, whatever happens with the wired nation, because I do not believe the basic market will "fragment" to anything like the degree it is fashionable to predict: 40% of the audience will be watching Flip Wilson even when 30 other channels are going. But I do hope the Commissioners will be able to disabuse themselves of the fashionable idea that it is societally a Bad Thing for 40% of the audience, all across the country, to be watching Flip Wilson. "Homogenization" as a policy is of course unfortunate; but multitudinous tribute to talent is a glory of any nation's cultural life, even when the person with the talent never went past 8th grade and can be enjoyed by others similarly situated.

III

If the arts have been neglected on television simply because channel capacity is a scarce resource that democracy must devote to more popular entertainment, then of course the multi-channel cable solves the problem automatically. Obviously, the world is more complicated than that. Somebody has to produce programs, to get them to audiences, and to pay the bills. Let us look seriatim at the ways these missions can be accomplished:

1) cable programming as an extension of a box-office: pay-TV. This was attempted in 1960-63 in the Toronto suburb of Etobicoke, by a subsidiary of Paramount Pictures. The cable in the system, which

extended at its peak to 5,800 homes, carried only programs originated by the company: broadcast programs were still received by the householder off the air. And at the beginning there was no fixed monthly charge for the service: payment was by coin into a box (a true box office), strictly for programs watched. Among those offered were an off-Broadway Hedda Gabler, a Broadway musical live from its theatre, and a performance of Menotti's The Consul (for $1.50; Jack Gould in The New York Times: "It is not too much to suggest that seeing the program, with Patricia Neway's superb tour-de-force in the heart-rending evocation of the human spirit under trial, must rank as one of the most civilized experiences in viewing that can be imagined."* So there). The big audiences were drawn by movies, and by the professional hockey and football games; and the whole venture went down the drain.

More ambitious in theory and in publicity was the STV pay system launched in Los Angeles and San Francisco in 1964. More than $12 million in hardware and telephone company cable was in place and about 12,000 homes had signed up when a state constitutional referendum prohibited pay-TV in California. Sylvester L. (Pat) Weaver, former president of the National Broadcasting Company, was the head of this operation, and its consultant on cultural matters was Sol Hurok. "Pay-TV," Hurok said at the time, "is the only instrument we have to use this invention for cultural enlightenment. In the long run it will be a great advantage to the artist. We use the same accounting system as records--it will be like an annuity,

*Triumph in Pay-Tv, New York Times, March 19, 1961, Sec. II, p. 13

7-1/2 per cent royalty. . ." Weaver spoke of bringing to California "the new production at the Kabuki Theatre, by satellite from Tokyo."

Indeed, more than that: "When he lets himself go," I wrote that year in an article about STV for the Saturday Evening Post,* "Weaver envisages a custom-tailored television service, built around a video tape recorder in every home. The householder will merely call up before he goes to bed, and let his television service know what he wants to see the next day--and the television service will synchronize its transmission with the home video recorder and put a couple of hours onto tape for him in six minutes. 'You want a special stock market report,' Weaver says earnestly, 'or you want to see Maria Callas's debut as Carmen at La Scala, or take a course in nuclear physics--all you'll have to do is make a phone call.' Weaver's dream starts from the proposition that if he can add several billion dollars a year to what Americans have been spending on arts and entertainment, he will lure from their lurking places whole schools of new talent now neglected by the unimaginative businessmen who run our cultural enterprises."

Plus ça change. . .

Pay-Tv is a dirty word around the cable companies, and in Congress. It is not, however,a dirty word around the executive offices of Madison Square Garden, where the current deal with the cable companies for the Knicks and Ranger games is regarded as

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*Mayer, Big Play for Pay-TV's $1.50 Splendors, Saturday Evening Post, May 2, 1964, vol. 237, pp. 71-75. The paragraph quoted here was not used in the article as printed. The title of the article is not mine.

nothing more than a sampling operation, drawing customers who will subsequently pay. Should the sports promoters win what will be a very bloody war, the arts impresarios and top-dog institutions will be right on their heels.

Personally, I think the attitudes which carried the California referendum in 1964 are semi-permanent in the society, and that pay-TV (especially on top of a monthly cable charge) is politically not viable. But the stakes are very large, and I believe a run will be made for them, especially by the Garden and the Metropolitan Opera, both of which seem likely to go broke unless a large remote box office can be generated.

2) cable as a technical variant of broadcast programming, with programs supported by advertisers. As you know, commercials are now legal under FCC rules (though Bob Bleyer, Teleprompter's director of programming, tells me they are resented in the sports events, which are the only place they appear in that service, and I imagine they would be resented even more in "serious" programming). In prime time commercial television, advertisers now pay a total of about 3¢ per household per hour (the hour including about 7 minutes of commercial messages, counting network and station sales). They might pay more to reach the high-income levels of the arts audience (the pro football games, which also reach high-income audiences, were salable last fall at slightly more than 4¢ per household per hour); but, on the other hand, the number of messages per hour would have to be drastically reduced. The move from pay-TV to sponsored programming, then, reduces potential receipts from a minimum of 50¢ a household an hour (which would be pretty cheap for an opera

or concert or play for the whole family) to a maximum of 4¢ a household (less agency commissions). Audiences would have to be much larger to yield equivalent revenues.

Given unusual complaisance by the unions, minimal selling costs associated with the purchase of the advertising minutes, inexpensive carriage to head ends and donation of the cable by its proprietors, I think we are talking about audiences of well over a million homes before advertiser-sponsored symphony concerts, operas or ballets can enlarge rather than drain the resources of our performing companies. Serious theatre is less expensive to produce and can probably be sustained on an advertising basis by a smaller audience--perhaps as small as half a million homes. All these figures assume that it will be technically possible to make satisfactory television from regular performances before audiences, and that the surcharge by those involved in the performance (actors, singers, dancers, musicians, stagehands, electricians, janitors, etc.) will be no more than, say, 150% over what they would be paid for an untelevised night's work. Both these assumptions could easily turn out to be false.

If live performances and television are to work symbiotically, some way will have to be found to convince television people that such programs are not a kind of slum housing. Despite the experience of the BBC, RAI, the Scandinavians and even ORTF (which does two plays a month from boulevard theatres), American television directors and producers insist that the results of filming or taping a production designed for theatrical performance are simply unworthy of their machinery. Yet the NET Uncle Vanya from the Birmingham Old Vic, whatever its defects, was surely no worse

technically than the single-set Andersonville Trial made for television and much acclaimed a few months back, and the NET Opera Abduction from the Seraglio had nothing to recommend it over the Peter Grimes the BBC did at Aldeburgh or even the Barbiere Japanese NHK taped at the Met in New York. Fortunately, cable people are at present less biased against taping real performances. Teleprompter in New York has done a tape with some interesting production values (until the dissolver broke down), of a garden-variety piano-violin-clarinet recital at the Washington Heights YM-YWHA, and will presently do a pair of one-act operas the Mannes School is presenting at the 92nd Street Y. With money, cable programmers would probably become as snooty as broadcast programmers about the unsuitability of live performances for broadcast, but that kind of money won't be around for a while.

Union problems are much more severe. Teleprompter was able to cablecast its tapes of the Y concert without paying the artists only because the musicians' union never heard about it. And the artists are only the beginning. Rogers Cable in Toronto wanted to tape an amateur theatrical presentation from the Queen Elizabeth Theatre. "The director was a professional," says Phil Lind, the young head of programming for Rogers, "and he wanted a couple of hundred bucks, which was okay. But the step-up fee for the stagehands--without lighting, which would have been extra--was $1800, and that we couldn't do. We did a folk festival with the finest rock groups in Canada, at a university, and we got releases from the groups, but after we ran it one of the groups called almost tearfully and said, Stop--they're going to take away our union card." The St. Lawrence Arts Centre in Toronto was built in part for

television origination (especially cable), but IATSE has ruled that even debates and speeches cannot be broadcast without a minimum stagehand and lighting crew at a step-up fee. The Centre, which is strapped, found itself in the monumentally embarrassing position of having to sell an appearance by the Premier of Canada for $350, to cover extra union consts. "Thank God," says Sandy McKee, who handles broadcasting for the Centre, "he didn't come." The experience was familiar for Miss McKee, who ran the broadcasting end of Expo '67, from which the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation tried to carry an appearance by the Winnipeg Ballet. The stagehands' demands were so high that CBC ultimately rebuilt all the sets in its studio and telecast a studio performance--dubbing in audience reaction from the theatre to simulate a live performance (!).

By far the most ambitious plans to date have been those hatched by John Goberman of the New York City Opera. In fall, 1970, Goberman got within two days and a few thousand dollars of a sale to Teleprompter of a performance of Donizetti's Lucia, to be cablecast live (one time only) from the stage of the New York State Theatre. Teleprompter offered $25,000, and Goberman thought he had all his union deals made to come in under that price, with something left over for the City Opera. "I'd say our unions have been--well, not flexible, but far-sighted," Goberman reports. "The musicians, for example, would have been paid one-tenth of their commercial videotape rate for the time. What held it at the end was a technical problem: the camera work would have required extra set-up time. And that pushed the price higher than Teleprompter would go."

These pages are being delivered on Tuesday, March 2nd, 1971;

and there was a meeting today between Goberman and representatives of Teleprompter and Manhattan Cable at which Goberman made a global offer of 44 opera and ballet evenings a year for seven years, at a fixed annual price of one million dollars. The City Opera and City Ballet would have the right to offer these same evenings simultaneously to other cable systems, which would pay separately, and the unions involved would participate in each payment pro rata to their participation in the original Teleprompter and Manhattan contracts.

Admittedly, much happens in the world that was undreamt of in my philosophy, but I would be truly surprised to see this deal come off. What Goberman is asking for is about one-fifth of the total revenues Teleprompter and Manhattan will receive from subscribers in 1971. He argues that they need him: "They should be offering their customers something broadcast television can't. With this sort of deal, the subscriber can have cable TV as a cultural resource in his house--like the World Book, though he never opens it. And twenty-five thousand dollars an evening is nothing for three hours of anything." But the public-relations and sales benefits of carrying opera and ballet from the State Theatre can be gained with the purchase of lots less than 44. And for a one-time use of each program, the advertising revenue possibilities just aren't there to pay even a fraction of the bills.

Actually, Goberman's deal could be a disaster in disguise, because it could freeze into cablecasting restrictions even more onerous than those which apply in broadcasting. Goberman's arrangements with the unions are such that it will be illegal to make a tape of the performance: "There's a kind of paranoia here,"

he says, "in their fear of being taken advantage of--if you make a tape, somebody's going to pirate it." But live-only goes against both the logic and the economics of cable.

This, I fear, is another of those moments when I must ask Commissioners to pause and consider the unfamiliar. The audiences estimated a few paragraphs back--at least a million homes for opera, half a million for drama--are not out of the question for cablecasts of serious stuff, but they almost certainly cannot be achieved on a single exposure. An advertiser can be assured an audience large enough to justify his expenditures only if the program is made available several (perhaps many) times, on each cable system. In theory, this makes no nevermind, because in theory cable with its many channels to fill is a multiple-use medium for programs. (Indeed, Nathaniel E. Feldman of the Rand Corporation waxes lyrical about the prosects: "Mere repetition [of the material on 13 broadcast channels] on other days and at other hours could consume 30 to 50 channels. TV watching, like moviegoing, could become more discriminating. . .Note that such extensive repetition of commercial TV would involve no additional costs for programming preparation."* But in fact all TV talent contracts, commercial and non-commercial, now provide for payment of "residuals" if a program is shown more than a

*Feldman, Cable Television and Satellites, Rand Corp. P-4171, August 1969, pp. 5-6

stated number of times (usually twice; some non-commercial contracts are drawn to permit two uses a year for two or three years). CBS would like to use cable systems to test pilots for new programs, but CBS lawyers have told the research department that a single such test would probably lead to payment of residuals from the second (rather than the third) broadcast use of the material.

All the pressures on those who would take responsibility for producing arts programs for television lead them to retain the residuals system: "We want to do this," says William Hadley, Director of Finance at the Metropolitan Opera, "on a basis of people being paid royalties for every use." The first significant contracts for opera, ballet and theatre on cable will probably be signed soon, by Goberman or others: it's valuable, even necessary public relations for an industry that will be scandal-spattered throughout the decade because the conditions of franchising invite scandal. If these contracts are drawn on a live-only or residuals basis, programming for cable will probably follow closely the patterns of programming for broadcast, and there will be very little of serious artistic value on the wire. No issue the Commission will discuss in its report is more immediate or more fundamental than this one.

All this is not to say, incidentally, that artists should sacrifice their share of profitable programs to impresarios or cable companies. Some circulation-based pricing structure would have to be developed out of simple fairness. But that structure would have to be significantly different from the

residuals structure if cable is to make a contribution to the professional performing arts or the audience for them.

3) cable programming as a gift to cable subscribers. This is the Canadian situation, because the Canadian Radio and Television Commission, concerned about the financial condition of broadcast TV in that country, fears a diversion of advertising revenues to cable companies. In the light of the previous discussion, the absence of any revenue assignable to arts programming would seem to doom the cablecasting of professional performance, but 'tain't necessarily so. In Vancouver, for example, Cablevision originates two half-hour programs a week featuring young artists--one called "Pianoforte," for outstanding diplomates of the local university music departments, another called "Festival of Stars," presenting winners of the annual Kiwanis Western Canada Music Festival. Performers are paid (in the $50-$100 range); "for some of them," says program director Vic Waters, "it's the first dollar they've ever earned." The Vancouver Art Gallery, too, has a half-hour a week dedicated to its use on Channel 10, and sometimes presents musical performers who are giving or have given concerts at the gallery. Teleprompter's little chamber recital from the YMHA would have been possible on a professional basis without advertising revenue: union minimums would have run no more than about $250 for the entire hundred minutes of the program.

Necessarily, such programming would be small potatoes, in terms of the size of the performing groups or the reputation of the performers. But the fact is that the young badly need showcases and experience before microphones and cameras. Though one would

hope that the wired nation would contribute more to the arts than debut appearances by young professionals working for minuscule fees, even that would be better than the expensive debut recital in a rented hall which is now a musician's first step toward a solo career--and might be better than the drudge work of off-Broadway for significant numbers of young actors and actresses. It wouldn't do much for the quality of programming on the cable--but for that purpose even ill-paid young professionals would be more valuable than amateurs.

IV

The obvious source of arts programming for cable systems is the university. At most universities, students produce dozens of plays every year, music departments give scores of concerts, happenings are planned and do actually happen. Many schools have broadcasting departments in their journalism or speech or education divisions, trainingstudents to operate television equipment; and most today have some sort of closed-circuit capability for instructional use, so someminimal level of experitse is instantly available for cable origination. And the cable companies, being urged or required by the FCC to offer unique, local programs, would like nothing better than signals from the universit to put on the cable.

But the university, while glad to offer sporting events and not unwilling to supply speakers who will tell viewers how to run their lives or the world, has been most uncooperative about supplying entertainment or art. At Hays, Kansas, for example, the local cable system (which is owned by the same people who own the local

broadcasting operation) has set up what is in effect a separate head end in Fort Hays Kansas State College (5,500 students). This facility passes through to dormitories and other college buildings whatever is on the public cable, and can add whatever else the college would like to send to its members, instructional or otherwise. In addition, a channel of the public system has been dedicated to the college, so that it can communicate to the town whatever it would like to put out. There are broadcasting courses for credit in the speech department, and a studio is built into the second floor of the college theatre: to televise anything going on in the theatre, students need merely dolly the cameras out to a separate small balcony. And in fact the cameras have gone onto the balcony--for student productions of plays, faculty recitals, even the staging of an opera written by a member of the music department. But nothing has ever been put on channel 12 for the subscribing public--or even on the "academic" cable for the students themselves. "They never use it," says Jack Heather, who runs the broadcasting courses. "These are thirty-five dollar tapes, just sitting there. I've begun to toss them into the 'to be used' bin."

Teleprompter reports that the University of Oregon in Eugene has supplied theatre pieces to the cable, but otherwise the experience of those I interviewed was almost entirely negative. "We made a community channel available to the radio-TV course at Scarborough Centennial College," says Gordon Keeble of Keeble Cable in Toronto, "and in eight months they produced one hour." Bill Brazeal, executive vice-president in charge of programming for

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Denver's Tele-Communications, Inc. (73 systems in 22 states), reports only a handful of hours of program from numerous university contacts: "What happens is that it's tremendously intriguing at the university when it starts, but it's work; takes time and effort to put together a meaningful program; and there's not much audience, and they lose enthusiasm. . ." Charitably, the college performers are seeking to retain the limited live audiences they have; uncharitably, the colleges are suffering a deep and perhaps justified suspicion of the third-rateness of their efforts, which presentation on the cable would reveal to a potentially unsympathetic public.

Local cable will undoubtedly receive some programming from amateur symphonies and little theatre groups, concerts and plays to be cablecast after a delay of a day or two, to preserve the live audience and (perhaps even more important) permit the performers to tune in on themselves. Cable is a big see-yourself-in-the-paper medium: Cablevision in Vancouver reports success with school and club soccer and football, taped in the afternoon and shown early in the evening so the participants can view. It is believed that members of winning teams tune in much more than members of losing teams.

After the fading of the initial pleasure of seeing one's own kind in action, amateur performances--indeed, all cable origination that relies on amateur work--may be unable to draw audience. Canadian experience, at any rate, argues that "community channels" are effectively dark in terms of viewing patterns except in periods of local stress or festival. In November, 1969, A. C. Nielsen did a special study of Middlesex County, Ontario, where

cable penetration exceeds 60% (80% in the county seat of London), and where the local cable companies have been offering original programs for some years. Among the results was "the fact that we were unable to find any viewing of measurable proportions to the locally programmed cable channel."* Ross McCreath, president of the Canadian TvB, which sponsored the study, reports that the 223 diaries distributed to cable homes did not show a single entry for the cable company's own channel in an entire week's viewing. Confirmation may be found in the Report of the Special Senate Committee on Mass Media, which hails "the development of community programmes on cable television. . .as a most welcome addition to the mass media in Canada, a new dimension that can dramatically improve the quality of life in our country,"# but accepts the accuracy of the TvB study• and prints a separate March 1969 survey of Metro London by the Bureau of Broadcast Measurement, in which a tabulation of some 25,000 quarter-hours of viewing by cable subscribers is completed to 100% without any mention of the cable company's own channel.**

Still, it would seem likely that some audience, some fraction of one per cent of the subscribers, could be found for amateur performances on a local cable system. And the possibility

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*The Effect of CATV on Television Viewing. Television Bureau of Canada. Toronto. Undated. p. 14

#Mass Media. Report of the Special Senate Committee on Mass Media. Information Canada, Ottawa, 1970. Vol. I, p. 216

•ibid, p. 218

**ibid, Vol. II, p. 391

of such performances might encourage the growth of amateur activity in the arts in many communities. Which brings us to what may be the most difficult philosophical tangle presented in these pages: the relative societal value of amateur and professional performances.

"The musician who has been a professional critic," Bernard Shaw wrote in 1917, "knows better even than Wagner that music is kept alive on the cottage piano of the amateur, and not in the concert rooms and opera houses of the great capitals."* In any calculus of pleasure, participation in music or dance or theatre would have to come out upscale from attendance at performances, for the society as a whole. Moreover, the support and audience for professionalism comes in large part from amateurs, who can appreciate most deeply the accomplishments of the artist.

But it is also true that amateurs by definition cannot develop the skills or indeed the art that keeps forms alive and kicking with the passage of generations. From the time of Shakespeare and Moliere to the present, theatre has flourished only at those moments and in those places where a critical mass of artists could make a living at it. The maintenance of that critical mass--of a reasonable pool of not-great executant artists--may be a requirement for the emergence of greatness in the arts. With rare exceptions, significant executants and creators in any of the collaborative arts start serious work while children. Because much more than just talent is ultimately required to make a contribution in the arts, only a minor fraction of those who seem so promising

*London Music 1888-1889, as Heard by Corno di Bassetto, Later Known as Bernard Shaw. Dodd, Mead & Co., New York, 1937, p. 397

in childhood and early adolescence ultimately become major artists. If it is not possible for those who fall short of memorable performance to live by their art, if there are to be only big winners and utter losers, the supply of those who try will dry up. Isaac Stern uses the analogy of the prize-fighters, which is a little unpleasant because prize-fighting is unpleasant, but by no means false.

There is no "correct" balance between amateur and professional in the arts; every generation finds its own, and bemoans the change from yesteryear. But the fact is that for almost half a century the market for the lesser professional has been shrinking, and the cries of the American Federation of Musicians and Actors' Equity have been heavy on the ears. As the Rockefeller Brothers report emphasized in 1965, the much-advertised "cultural explosion" has been predominantly amateur.* The availability of talent of national calibre, via films, records, television, crushes professionalism of merely local calibre. Meanwhile, the "economic dilemma" described by Baumol and Bowen--the tendency of unit costs to rise rapidly in service industries when wage rates are pegged to increasing productivity in manufacturing industries--makes the not-quite-first-rate professional seem awfully expensive for value received. As Baumol and Bowen put it at the end of their book, "This area lives under the shadow of its own Gresham's law: without constant vigilance and willingness to bear the constantly rising costs of professional performance, amateur activity will

*Rockefeller Panel Report: The Performing Arts: Problems and Prospects. McGraw-Hill. New York, 1965. p. 13

tend to drive the trained performer from the field."*

Ours is a time when people are very conscious of all that can go wrong with a technological novelty, and not very conscious of the human resourcefulness that deals with things that go wrong. Thinking about a wired nation is a worrisome activity for someone interested in the future of the arts; indeed, the better the service on the cable the worse the worrying, because the arts require a willingness of audiences to go out at night and give their human attention and human reaction to performers. (The cities need a willingness for people to go out at night, too, but that's somebody else's department.) What ought to be done and how, I don't know. What I do know is that people should be thinking about the problem, and they're not, not really; and I hope I've got you started.

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One further topic: cable and art as seen by the counter-culture. Half-inch videotape has become the medium of choice for sections of what calls itself The Movement. They approach the problems of this medium with the same graceful insouciance they apply elsewhere: "The VIDEOFREEX," reads an announcement in Vol. I No. 1 of Radical Software (summer 1970), "are involved in television technically and artistically, intellectually and emotionally. Technical labors bring us together. We are in a web of video/audio energy flows. We are caught in the act of electronic fucking. And we sure like to fuck. Contact us at 98 Prince Street, NYC." Nebbish.

"If you need a picture that's always clear, alternative

*Baumol & Bowen, op. cit., p. 407

television isn't going to make it," says Jay K. Hoffman, an interesting impresario who has presented attractions from baroque music to Jeanne-Marie Darré to Czech puppets and rock groups. "If you're talking about a verite, then maybe--and maybe big. As of 1971, the stuff is below any standards, it's inarticulate on every level, but the seminal aspect is being ignored. Watching it gave me a feeling for the subject--what used to be called 'heart'. . ."

There are technical problems involved in cablecasting the half-inch tapes of the radicals, and the Canadians say the problems can't be solved: one-inch is a minimum technical standard. Thea Sklover, who has been responsible for securing New York State Arts Council grants for the videotape communes, believes half-inch can be made viable. Teleprompter engineers don't believe in it, but are acquiring the new Sony half-inch color equipment. "Half-inch," says Nancy Salkin of Teleprompter, "answers an awful lot of needs; it has to work."

If the technical difficulties can be overcome, there is every reason to give these kids their chance on the cable, and to call it "art" if they like. (They may not like.) There is almost certainly some talent here, though probably not much. At present, the product doesn't improve, because everybody's tape expresses something deep within himself or herself, and the mere utterance of a criticism is repressive, and if it doesn't bore me you aren't allowed to be bored, not in a real democracy. Getting it out where strangers can see it might stimulate that sense of a need for craft which is the foundation of all art.

I do think, though, that the legal prohibition against broadcast obscenity, written into the Communications Act, should be maintained in cable. The objection used to defeat the First Amendment argument in broadcasting cannot be sustained here--there is no shortage of channels to impel a supervised franchise--but the common carrier analogy will serve the same purpose well enough. It's an offense to shout obscenities in somebody's ear over the telephone, even if you dialed a wrong number. Artistically, of course, the chance of getting something worth having from these experimenters will be much improved if they are structured into situations where they must sublimate their aggressions. In any event, it is one of the attractions of the cable that more people will get a chance to earn the privilege (it is never a "right") of being taken seriously.